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ABSTRACT

Formative evaluation emphasizes continuous assessment within a unit of study. There are many ways which may be used by the reading teacher to ascertain pupil achievement: teacher observation, a checklist of important reading behaviors, rating scales, anecdotal statements, teacher written tests, class discussions, self evaluation forms, parent/teacher conferences, data from state mandated tests, and input from teacher aides, student teachers, and substitute teachers. State mandated tests may be improved by addressing their validity and reliability, by presenting data to teachers early in the school year so instruction may be altered, by being pilot tested, and by making accommodations for the handicapped. Teacher accountability may well be shown in portfolio form, and might include snapshots of pupil products, representative papers of pupil work, awards and recognition received by the teacher, and certificates of attendance at workshops. Ratings given by supervisors pertaining to the quality of teaching need inclusion in the portfolio as well and may be used in formative evaluation to improve ongoing instruction. (RS)

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Formative Evaluation in the Reading Curriculum.

by Marlow Ediger

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FORMATIVE EVALUATION IN THE READING CURRICULUM

Formative evaluation emphasizes continuous assessment along the way of pupil achievement within a unit of study. Summative evaluation, in contrast, pertains to assessment at the end of the teaching unit. Formative evaluation indicates that changes may still be made in the reading curriculum based on assessment, before the end of the unit of study. Formative evaluation is based on diagnosis followed by remediation. Remediative teaching is then used to improve the current strand of instruction Generally, formative evaluations will be used to ascertain if modifications are necessary along the way in teaching and learning before the terminal point of the unit of study is reached.

Methods of Formative Evaluation

There are a plethora of formative procedures which may be used by the teacher to ascertain pupil achievement as the unit progresses toward the end. One approach is teacher observation of learner achievement. The observations made will stress pupil achievement in meeting objectives of instruction. Which may be selected items to observe in formative evaluation of pupil achievement? First, the teacher might observe how well the pupil is actively engaged in reading. Paying careful attention is necessary in order that sequential pupil learnings accrue. If attention is waning, the teacher needs to ascertain why this is happening. There are multiple possible causes. One cause might be a lack of background information needed by the pupil to experience more optimal achievement. If background information is lacking, then it becomes more difficult to comprehend and understand content read. This also makes for a lack of pupil engagement and attention in the reading act. The teacher then may spend more time in guiding the learner to secure related subject matter to facilitate the act of reading. An added illustration, shown and discussed for example, may then help the learner to obtain the necessary background information.

Second, a checklist of important reading behaviors may be photocopied for each pupil. Each pupil's name should be written on the top of a checklist and dated, as to when the evaluation was made. For example, if one item on the checklist pertains to pupils using context clues properly in reading, then the teacher needs to notice if a pupil is achieving this objective of instruction. A check mark is made if the pupil on this item is using context clues at an appropriate developmental level. The

teacher may forget where each pupil is achieving unless it is recorded in check list form. He/she has a better basis for determining what comes next in sequence in teaching and learning if recordings are made in a check list.

Third, closely related to checklists are rating scales to indicate pupil achievement in a certain facet of reading instruction. The checklist for each pupil needs to be photocopied and the name of the assessee written at the top. A reasonable listing of pupil behaviors are listed on the rating scale. The teacher, when observing a pupil, rates that learner on a five point rating scale. For example, if one item on the rating scale pertains to using syllabication skills effectively in reading, the teacher needs to show on the rating, through careful observation, where a child should appear in achievement. A five rating indicates "excellent" and a "one" indicates a need for considerable improvement. Results from the rating scale may be placed into a pupil's non-permanent cumulative folder for reference and for making comparisons with future evaluations.

Fourth, an anecdotal statement may be written by the teacher to indicate a pupil's achievement in a facet of reading achievement. Thus, if a pupil is to be assessed in using initial consonant sounds to identify unknown words, the teacher may, through observation, write a sentence or two to reveal learner achievement and progress. The entry needs to be dated. If sequential entries in time are made, a diary type of evaluation is in evidence. The teacher may then notice entries covering a longer period of time and study the progress made of a reader. A better basis for evaluation is then made of achievement of a pupil meeting the goals of reading instruction.

Fifth, a teacher written test, with appropriate validity and reliability, may be developed to ascertain how well a pupil is achieving an objective of reading instruction. Multiple choice or essay test items may be written. A multiple choice test item may indicate if a pupil can notice which of four words is spelled incorrectly. These are words which have been taught in ongoing lessons in the teaching of reading. Then too, a teacher written essay test may be used to notice if pupils can read and determine the main idea read. From the test, the reader also may be asked to choose one or more supporting ideas to a main idea.

Sixth, a class discussion may be held pertaining to pupils indicating which areas of reading are causing problems in comprehension. The teacher may take notes on the discussion and list problem areas identified by pupils. More help, for example, may be needed in the area of problem solving in the

content fields. The identification of problems, gathering of information, developing an hypothesis, and testing the hypothesis, can be quite detailed and involved for pupils, such as in literature, social studies, science, and mathematics. Pupils in the discussion have then indicated what needs more emphasis in the teaching of reading. Learners need to have ample opportunities to say what should be stressed in the teaching of reading. Diagnosis and remediation is then in evidence.

Seventh, a self evaluation form listing items that may cause difficulties in reading for pupils may be written by the teacher. Pupils may then indicate with a rating, from one to five, in which personal area(s) more assistance is necessary in reading instruction. The information from pupil responses may be used by the teacher to determine objectives for teaching reading.

Eighth, from parent/teacher conferences, the latter may obtain needed information on helping the child to improve reading performance. Dialogues with parents pertaining to their offspring's reading achievement might well provide salient ideas on helping the learner to achieve more optimally. Gathering data for decision making is important in formative evaluation.

Ninth, test data from state mandated tests, when accessible, may be used to guide decision making in determining the reading curriculum. The teacher, here, needs to ascertain what is valid from these test results to use in the present program of reading instruction. Information for formative evaluation needs to be gathered continuously. The information may provide ideas for making corrections in the present program of instruction.

Tenth, teacher aides, student teachers, and substitute teachers might notice what else needs to be emphasized in a quality reading curriculum. They should present their suggestions to the classroom teacher (Ediger, 2000, Chapter Eight).

From the above named ten sources, the teacher may obtain feedback to stress in formative evaluation. The feedback can provide corrective information in terms of the direction that the reading curriculum should follow for each pupil. Formative information and evaluation should come rather continuously prior to any final evaluation when a unit of instruction has been completed in reading. Much emphasis is being placed today upon teacher accountability and pupil test scores coming from state mandated testing. These test scores may have the following weaknesses which need to be corrected by test writers

as well as by the state department of education. The following are then offered as suggestions to improve state mandated tests:

1. improve the validity of test items by tailoring them to the reading objectives for a specific school district. A test must be valid to measure what is being emphasized as objectives within a local school district. Otherwise, state mandated tests may measure something not taught in a school district in reading instruction. Fairness in testing is then not involved when pupils say, "But we did not have those things in class which were on the state mandated test."
2. state mandated tests should be given to provide feedback to teachers on some possible learnings which should be stressed in reading. Formative evaluation is then involved. If the state mandated test is given at the end of the school year, as in summative evaluation, the results might not be too valuable for teachers. With the summer months coming, forgetting may occur before the new school year begins.
3. reliability needs to be in the offing for state mandated tests. The data should provide test/retest, split half, and/or alternative forms reliability. Why? Tests need to measure consistently for pupils or the test has little worth.
4. all tests given on the state level should be pilot tested before being taken by students. This is necessary in order to take out kinks and weaknesses therein. In high stakes testing situations, in particular, where decisions are made as to who will/will not receive a high school diploma, it becomes imperative for several pilot studies of a test be made after the administration of each.
5. accommodations need to be made for handicapped pupils taking the test. For the visually impaired, in particular, it is salient to make these accommodations (See Gunning, 2000).

The Teacher Portfolio

Teacher accountability may well be shown in portfolio form. Information sources, from pupil achievement, may then become a part of the teacher's portfolio. The following might be inherent in the portfolio:

1. snapshots of pupil products such as art work, construction activities, and dramatizations of learner experiences within ongoing reading lessons and units of study.
2. representative papers of pupil work in literature, mathematics, science, and social studies.
3. a video-tape of pupils working within a committee setting.

4. awards and recognition received by the teacher from educational, civic, and social circles.

5. listing of duties performed in society such as being involved in tutoring pupils in reading, food distribution to the needy, work in church school and other religious organizations, membership in and being an officer in a societal club, or a sponsor in diverse clubs as Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, among other forms of voluntary service to the community.

6. a transcript showing course work in reading taken at an approved institution of higher education. Online courses are becoming increasingly popular, and also may be listed from an accredited university.

7. certificates of attendance at workshops, state and national attendance at professional meetings such as state affiliates of, and the national, International Reading Association.

8. working toward, or completion of, being certified by The National Board, Professional Teaching Standards.

9. doing an independent study on a selected facet of instruction such as improving the classroom environment for reading instruction.

10. engaging in school research with an appropriate title, using quality measurement instruments and random sampling of students in the study, as well as a carefully planned research design (Ediger, 2000, 38- 44).

The above are examples of what might go into a teacher portfolio. Pupil test scores may also be an inherent part. The teacher, here, needs to think of what should go into a port folio to indicate professional accountability. Ratings given by supervisors pertaining to the quality of teaching accomplished need inclusion. All of these may be shared with appropriate individuals, such as school supervisors and administrators, as needed, to indicate teacher achievement. The above may be used in formative evaluation to improve ongoing instruction.

References

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